

12 Things Successful People Do Differently

1. They create and pursue S.M.A.R.T. goals.

Successful people are objective. They have realistic targets in mind. They know what they are looking for and why they are fighting for it. Successful people create and pursue S.M.A.R.T. goals.

S.M.A.R.T. goals are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, and **T**imely. Let's briefly review each:

- **Specific** – A general goal would be, “Get in shape.” But a related specific goal would be, “Join a health club and workout 3 days a week for the next 52 weeks.” A specific goal has a far greater chance of being accomplished because it has defined parameters and constraints.
- **Measurable** – There must be a logical system for measuring the progress of a goal. To determine if your goal is measurable, ask yourself questions like: How much time? How many total? How will I know when the goal is accomplished? etc. When you measure your progress, you stay on track, reach your target dates, and experience the exhilaration of achievement that spurs you on to continued efforts required to reach your goal.
- **Attainable** – To be attainable, a goal must represent an objective toward which you are both willing and able to work. In other words, the goal must be realistic. The big question here is: How can the goal be accomplished?
- **Relevant** – Relevance stresses the importance of choosing goals that matter. For example, an internet entrepreneur's goal to “Make 75 tuna sandwiches by 2:00PM.” may be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, and Timely, but lacks Relevance to an entrepreneur's overarching objective of building a profitable online business.
- **Timely** – A goal must be grounded within a time frame, giving the goal a target date. A commitment to a deadline helps you focus your efforts on the completion of the goal on or before the due date. This part of the S.M.A.R.T. goal criteria is intended to prevent goals from being overtaken by daily distractions.

When you identify S.M.A.R.T. goals that are truly important to you, you become motivated to figure out ways to attain them. You develop the necessary attitude, abilities, and skills. You can achieve almost any goal you set if you plan your steps wisely and establish a time frame that allows you to carry out those steps. Goals that once seemed far away and out of reach eventually move closer and become attainable, not because your goals shrink, but because you grow and expand to match them.

2. They take decisive and immediate action.

The acquisition of knowledge doesn't mean you're growing. Growing happens when what you know changes how you live. So many people live in a complete daze. Actually, they don't 'live.' They simply 'get by' because they never take the necessary action to make things happen – to seek their dreams.

It doesn't matter if you have a genius IQ and a PhD in Quantum Physics, you can't change anything or make any sort of real-world progress without taking action. There's a huge difference between knowing how to do something and actually doing it. Knowledge and intelligence are both useless without action. It's as simple as that.

Success hinges on the simple act of making a decision to live – to absorb yourself in the process of going after your dreams and goals. So make that decision. And take action. For some practical guidance on taking action I highly recommend [*Getting Things Done*](#).

3. They focus on being productive, not being busy.

In his book, [*The 4-Hour Workweek*](#), Tim Ferris says, “Slow down and remember this: Most things make no difference. Being busy is often a form of mental laziness – lazy thinking and indiscriminate action.” This is Ferris' way of saying “work smarter, not harder,” which happens to be one of the most prevalent modern day personal development clichés. But like most clichés, there's a great deal of truth to it, and few people actually adhere to it.

Just take a quick look around. The busy outnumber the productive by a wide margin.

Busy people are rushing all over the place, and running late half of the time. They're heading to work, conferences, meetings, social engagements, etc. They barely have enough free time for family get-togethers and they rarely get enough sleep. Yet, business emails are shooting out of their smart phones like machine gun bullets, and their daily planner is jammed to the brim with obligations.

Their busy schedule gives them an elevated sense of importance. But it's all an illusion. They're like hamsters running on a wheel.

The solution: Slow down. Breathe. Review your commitments and goals. **Put first things first.** Do one thing at a time. Start now. Take a short break in two hours. Repeat.

And always remember, results are more important than the time it takes to achieve them.

4. They make logical, informed decisions.

Sometimes we do things that are permanently foolish simply because we are temporarily upset or excited.

Although emotional ‘gut instincts’ are effective in certain fleeting situations, when it comes to generating long-term, sustained growth in any area of life, emotional decisions often lead a person astray. Decisions driven by heavy emotion typically contain minimal amounts of conscious thought, and are primarily based on momentary feelings instead of mindful awareness.

The best advice here is simple: Don't let your emotions trump your intelligence. Slow down and think things through before you make any life-changing decisions.

5. They avoid the trap of trying to make things perfect.

Many of us are perfectionists in our own right. I know I am at times. We set high bars for ourselves and put our best foot forward. We dedicate copious amounts of time and attention to our work to maintain our high personal standards. Our passion for excellence drives us to run the extra mile, never stopping, never relenting. And this dedication towards perfection undoubtedly helps us achieve results... So long as we don't get carried away.

But what happens when we do get carried away with perfectionism?

We become disgruntled and discouraged when we fail to meet the (impossibly high) standards we set for ourselves, making us reluctant to take on new challenges or even finish tasks we've already started. Our insistence on dotting every 'I' and crossing every 'T' breeds inefficiency, causing major delays, stress overload and subpar results.

True perfectionists have a hard time starting things and an even harder time finishing them, always. I have a friend who has wanted to start a graphic design business for several years. But she hasn't yet. Why? When you sift through her extensive list of excuses it comes down to one simple problem: She is a perfectionist. Which means she doesn't, and never will, think she's good enough at graphic design to own and operate her own graphic design business.

Remember, the real world doesn't reward perfectionists. It rewards people who get things done. And the only way to get things done is to be imperfect 99% of the time. Only by wading through years of practice and imperfection can we begin to achieve momentary glimpses of the perfection. So make a decision. Take action, learn from the outcome, and repeat this method over and over again in all walks of life. Also, check out [Too Perfect](#). It's an excellent read on conquering perfectionism.

6. They work outside of their comfort zone.

The number one thing I persistently see holding smart people back is their own reluctance to accept an opportunity simply because they don't think they're ready. In other words, they feel uncomfortable and believe they require additional knowledge, skill, experience, etc. before they can aptly partake in the opportunity. Sadly, this is the kind of thinking that stifles personal growth and success.

The truth is nobody ever feels 100% ready when an opportunity arises. Because most great opportunities in life force us to grow emotionally and intellectually. They force us to stretch ourselves and our comfort zones, which means we won't feel totally comfortable at first. And when we don't feel comfortable, we don't feel ready.

Significant moments of opportunity for personal growth and success will come and go throughout your lifetime. If you are looking to make positive changes and new breakthroughs in your life, you will need to embrace these moments of opportunity even though you will never feel 100% ready for them.

7. They keep things simple.

Leonardo da Vinci once said, “Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.” Nothing could be closer to the truth. Here in the 21st century, where information moves at the speed of light and opportunities for innovation seem endless, we have an abundant array of choices when it comes to designing our lives and careers. But sadly, an abundance of choice often leads to complication, confusion and inaction.

Several business and marketing studies have shown that the more product choices a consumer is faced with, the less products they typically buy. After all, narrowing down the best product from a pool of three choices is certainly a lot easier than narrowing down the best product from a pool of three hundred choices. If the purchasing decision is tough to make, most people will just give up. Likewise, if you complicate your life by inundating yourself with too many choices, your subconscious mind will give up.

The solution is to simplify. If you’re selling a product line, keep it simple. And if you’re trying to make a decision about something in your life, don’t waste all your time evaluating every last detail of every possible option. Choose something that you think will work and give it a shot. If it doesn’t work out, learn what you can from the experience, choose something else and keep pressing forward.

8. They focus on making small, continuous improvements.

Henry Ford once said, “Nothing is particularly hard if you divide it into small pieces.” The same concept configured as a question: How do you eat an elephant? Answer: One bite at a time. This philosophy holds true for achieving your biggest goals. Making small, positive changes – eating a little healthier, exercising a little, creating some small productive habits, for example – is an amazing way to get excited about life and slowly reach the level of success you aspire to.

And if you start small, you don’t need a lot of motivation to get started either. The simple act of getting started and doing something will give you the momentum you need, and soon you’ll find yourself in a positive spiral of changes – one building on the other. When I started doing this in my life, I was so excited I had to start [this blog](#) to share it with the world.

Start with just one activity, and make a plan for how you will deal with troubles when they arise. For instance, if you’re trying to lose weight, come up with a list of healthy snacks you can eat when you get the craving for snacks. It will be hard in the beginning, but it will get easier. And that’s the whole point. As your strength grows, you can take on bigger challenges.

9. They measure and track their progress.

Successful people are not only working in their job/business, they are also working **on** it. They step back and assess their progress regularly. They track themselves against their goals and clearly know what needs to be done to excel and accelerate.

You can't control what you don't properly measure. If you track the wrong things you'll be completely blind to potential opportunities as they appear over the horizon. Imagine if, while running a small business, you made it a point to keep track of how many pencils and paperclips you used. Would that make any sense? No! Because pencils and paperclips are not a measure of what's important for a business. Pencils and paperclips have no bearing on income, customer satisfaction, market growth, etc.

The proper approach is to figure out what your number one goal is and then track the things that directly relate to achieving that goal. I recommend that you take some time right now to identify your number one goal, identify the most important things for you to keep track of, and then begin tracking them immediately. On a weekly basis, plug the numbers into a spreadsheet and use the data to create weekly or monthly trend graphs so you can visualize your progress. Then fine-tune your actions to get those trends to grow in your favor.

10. They maintain a positive outlook as they learn from their mistakes.

Successful people concentrate on the positives – they look for the silver lining in every situation. They know that it is their positivity that will take them to greatness. If you want to be successful, you need to have a positive outlook toward life. Life will test you again and again. If you give in to internal negativity, you will never be able to achieve the marks you have targeted.

Remember, every mistake you make is progress. Mistakes teach you important lessons. Every time you make one, you're one step closer to your goal. The only mistake that can truly hurt you is choosing to do nothing simply because you're too scared to make a mistake.

So don't hesitate – don't doubt yourself! Don't let your own negativity sabotage you. Learn what you can and press forward.

11. They spend time with the right people.

Successful people associate with people who are likeminded, focused, and supportive. They socialize with people who create energy when they enter the room versus those who create energy when they leave. They reach out to connected, influential individuals who are right for their dreams and goals.

You are the sum of the people you spend the most time with. If you hang with the wrong people, they will negatively affect you. But if you hang with the right people, you will become far more capable and successful than you ever could have been alone. Find your tribe and work together to make a difference in all of your lives. [*Tribes*](#) by Seth Godin is a great read on this topic.

12. They maintain balance in their life.

If you ask most people to summarize what they want out of life they'll shout out a list of things like: 'fall in love,' 'make money,' 'spend time with family,' 'find happiness,' 'achieve goals,' etc. But sadly, a lot of people don't balance their life properly to achieve these things. Typically

they'll achieve one or two of them while completely neglecting the rest. Let me give you two examples:

- I know an extremely savvy businesswoman who made almost a million dollars online last year. Based on the success of her business, every entrepreneur I know looks up to her. But guess what? A few days ago, out of the blue, she told me that she's depressed. Why? "I'm burnt out and lonely. I just haven't taken enough time for myself lately, and I feel like something is missing in my life," she said. "Wow!" I thought. "One of the most successful people I know doesn't feel successful because she isn't happy with how she has balanced her life."
- I also know a surfer who surfs all day, every day on the beach in front of our condo complex in San Diego. He's one of the most lighthearted, optimistic guys I've ever met – usually smiling from ear to ear. But he sleeps in a rusty van he co-owns with another surfer, and they both frequently panhandle tourists for money. He has admitted to me that the stress of making enough money to eat often keeps him up at night. So while I can't deny that this man seems happy most of the time, I wouldn't classify his life as a success story.

Full article can be found at <http://www.marcandangel.com/2012/01/22/12-things-successful-people-do-differently/>

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